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The influence of dogs on the work climate, the community and people's wellbeing in the office and prerequisites under which companies can benefit from the presence of dogs

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## **Abstract**

*The influence of dogs on the work climate, the community and people's wellbeing in the office and prerequisites under which companies can benefit from the presence of dogs*

This paper studies the effects of dogs on the work climate, the work community and employee wellbeing in the office setting and looks into under which circumstances companies can benefit from pet-friendly policies. Based on an inductive research approach, interviews were used as data collection. Results indicate that dogs can lower stress for employees, increase communication and foster higher social cohesion if a flexible organizational culture and policies with job autonomy, open communication and trial and error mentality is in place. But if companies are inflexible, allowing pets at work can create more pressure and stress for the employees.

## **Keywords**

Human-dog relationship

Pet-friendly policies

## **Introduction**

The workplace environment is becoming increasingly competitive for companies and human resources became the strongest asset to create a competitive advantage (Němečková 2017). Therefore, the chance of success of companies is determined by the extent to which organisations are able to maintain optimal performance, together with commitment, morale, and well-being of their employees (Davies, 1999). Business managers and human resource management are constantly in the search for means and measures that increase the work climate, productivity and performance levels of employees also taking into account that stress, personal well-being and the ability to balance work and life also impacts productivity (den Dulk and Ruijter 2008).

A more controversial policy that may address these issues is the implementation of pet-friendly policies at the workplace. Pets and especially dogs have proven to have a positive influence on people's well-being (Odendaal and Weyers 1990; Anderson et al. 1992; Friedmann et al. 2011; Friedmann et al. 1980; Lentino et al. 2012), reduce stress (Odendaal and Weyers 1990; Vormbrock and Grossberg 1988; Foreman et al. 2019; Straatman et al. 1997) and offer emotional support (Odendaal and Weyers 1990; McConnell et al. 2011). Companies like Google, Apple and Amazon already allow dogs in the office (Foreman et al. 2017). Little is known though how dogs influence the work environment and if prerequisites exists for companies to be able to benefit from pet-friendly policies. Therefore, this study investigates how dogs influence the environment, the community and people's well-being in the work environment and under which circumstances companies can benefit from a pet-friendly policy. To answer these questions, the human-dog relationship and its benefits for people is analysed. After this, the state of research regarding dogs in organizations will be reviewed. Because impact on work environment and community is hard to measure, an inductive research approach was chosen for this paper. A total of 12 interviews with dog-owners, who bring their dogs into

the office, and managers in these companies were conducted and systematically analysed and finally, the evolved data was formed into a ground theory.

### **Literature review**

#### ***The human-dog relationship and its benefits***

The human-pet interaction and bonding is an ancient development of an interspecies relationship in particular with cats or dogs (Dotson and Hyatt 2008). Dogs have been labelled “men’s’ best friend”, highlighting the depth of the relationship. According to numerous researches, dog-owners benefit from this relationship with increased mental and physical health, which will be looked at first.

The therapeutic value of dogs has been the focus in various studies. The general belief holds that dogs positively impact people that get in contact with them. Dog-accompanied therapy has been proven to be quite effective (Limond et al. 1997; Martin and Farnum 2002; Batson et al. 1998), especially with children, the vulnerable and the elderly (Smith 2012). Studies also relate dog-ownership to a reduction of depression (Friedmann et al. 2011; Lentino et al. 2012) and especially the elderly benefits from dogs as companions (Raina et al. 1999).

One reason why psychological well-being seems to increase with pets is their function as social support. According to Foreman et al. (2017), “the term “social support” is often used to describe the mechanisms by which relationships with other people buffer individuals from stress” due to a social bond. Scientists found a oxytocin positive feedback loop between dogs and humans (Odendaal and Meintjes 2003), a hormone that plays an important role in the development of human bonds, leading to the believe that the bound between dog and human can act as social support for humans. Further, studies show that dogs offer a certain kind of social support for owners and that the animal relationship decreases negative emotions resulting from rejection experiences. (McConnell et al. 2011). Participants with a social needs fulfilment from their dog reported less depression, less loneliness and a greater subjective happiness. In addition, dogs

make a unique contribution to the well-being of their owners rather than only substituting peer social support (McConnell et al. 2011).

Another factor in the role of dogs in the increase of human mental well-being is the relaxing influence of dogs on humans. The influence of dogs has been tried to be linked to stress release in multiple researches. Decrease of cortisol levels, a stress hormone, was be found in positive dog-human interaction (Odendaal and Weyers 1990). Studies found that the presence of a companion dog reduces the stress levels of women compared to talking to a close friend (Allen et al. 1991, p. 582), and the presence of unfamiliar dogs decrease cortisol levels and heart rate as physical indicators for lower stress (Polheber and Matchock 2014; Odendaal and Meintjes 2003). Miller et al. (2009) found that women might be more effected of the relaxing influence of dogs than men. Other studies from Vormbrock and Grossberg (1988), Straatman et al. (1997) and Gee et al. (2014) on the other hand were not able to reveal physical evidence between stress and dogs, neither in change in blood pressure nor in stress test results. While some researchers believe that the difference in results can be somewhat explained by the familiarity of the dog and the environment with familiar dogs having a more positive influence on the owner's stress level than unfamiliar but friendly dogs (Polheber and Matchock 2014; Straatman et al. 1997), the data is not conclusive and leaves room for doubt. While those studies cannot answer the question whether dogs really reduce stress, owners and people interacting with dogs certainly believe so (Foreman et al. 2019). Studies measuring self-reported stress show a significant impact on dogs on stress report when interacting with own or unfamiliar dog. (Ward-Griffin et al. 2018). Perceived, subjectively evaluated higher self-reported stress has been connected to lower levels of well-being during multiple studies (Schiffrin et al. 2009; Moeini et al. 2008; Skok et al. 2006), making dogs a valuable impact on the stress level and psychological well-being of humans, physically measurable or not.

The impact of dogs on the physical well-being is somewhat controversial in the literature as well. While some studies relate owning a dog to increase health factors like lower blood pressure (Anderson et al. 1992; Lentino et al. 2012) and recovering from illnesses faster (Friedmann et al. 1980; Friedmann et al. 2011) other studies revealed no such relationship (Parslow and Jorm 2003, p. 468) . But, studies show that dogs in general have a positive impact on the amount of exercise of owners (Westgarth et al. 2019; Potter et al. 2019; Lentino et al. 2012) which is also related to better health.

In addition, dogs can also have positive influences on group dynamics, increase social interactions and social behaviours (Fick 1993; Colarelli et al. 2017). Groups with dogs present seem more cooperative and friendly and show higher cooperation and physical intimacy. In addition, trust is rated higher in groups where a dog is present (Colarelli et al. 2017).

Dogs tend to increase social interactions in group therapy settings ( (Fick 1993, p. 529), with strangers but also with friends and acquaintances, which even leads to friendships and increase in social support in groups and therefor influence the long term relationships in communities (Hall and Mills 2019, p. 12; McNicholas and Collis 2000; Bulsara et al. 2007). This might be related to an dog-related increase of oxytocin in humans, which is linked to an increase of pro-social behaviour (Yao et al. 2018).

### ***Dogs in the office***

Looking at the positive influence of dogs on people's well-being, it is no wonder that more and more companies implement pet-friendly policies. Especially taking into consideration that employees nowadays operate in an extremely competitive and stressful environment and that more and more, employers realize that they can improve employee performance and therefor company productivity by promoting healthy and content employees and healthy work environments. Pet-friendly policies can be defined as “rules, guidelines, and procedures that

accept, welcome and regulate the presence of pets into the working environment, in order to benefit from the human-animal bond and interaction” (Johnson and Yolandé 2017).

Big American tech companies in Silicon Valley like Amazon, Google or Apple have had pet-friendly policies in place for years. At Amazon, around 2000 dogs are brought to work regularly at the main campus (Daniels 2015). In general, people bring dogs more often when working in smaller offices (Hall and Mills 2019, p. 6) and in smaller, more creative companies and non-profit institutions (Foderaro 1999).

Keeping the human-dog relationship in mind, three reasons for companies to foster pet-friendly policies are mostly discussed:

- a) Dog as stress releaser and a source of social support and its impact on job satisfaction and job engagement

Dogs release stress in a person’s life so why not use this benefit in a work setting. In general, correlations have been confirmed between stress and decrease of productivity as well as job dissatisfaction and depression (Lerner et al. 2004). Burnout tendencies, which are related to higher stress and dissatisfaction increase the likelihood of turnover intention (Du Plooy and Roodt 2010). Finding ways to reduce stress for employees is thereby important to gain a competitive advantage from human capital. The work environment can benefit from the relaxing influence of dogs, decreasing stress for owners and co-workers. A recent study found that while there is no difference in cortisol level between dog owners and non-dog owners, people that brought their companions to work have lower self-reported stress at work (Barker et al. 2012). In addition, the highest perceived function of pets in the workplace is to reduce stress, reported from owners, managers and non-owners (Wells and Perrine 2001, p. 85).

In addition, allowing dogs in the company can also reduce the stress related to the personal life of the dog-owners. This is highly relevant due to the fact that not only stress and dissatisfaction at work can lead to loss in productivity, but also personal problems and stress can effect job

performance (Greenhaus et al. 1987). Dog-owners who are allowed to bring a dog to feel less stressed combining their companion with work than owners that either leave their dogs at home or in a professional institution (Norling and Keeling 2010), making pet-friendly policies an instrument to better employee work-life balance.

As mentioned earlier, dogs can offer a feeling of social support. In a work setting, increased social support has a positive influence on job performance and decreases the likelihood of depression (Sinokki et al. 2009). The effect of higher social support might extend to the workplace, but to the knowledge of the author no studies have been conducted.

But while all those factors might relate to job satisfaction, engagement and turnover intention, surprisingly little research has been to prove this. Hall and Mills (2019) found a significant higher self-reported work engagement and less turnover intention. This takes the discovery of Barker (2005) farther, who reported that employees who are allowed to bring their pets to work scored higher on multiple job satisfaction scales. Also people who bring their dogs to work rate their companies higher on benefits and organizational support than employees, who do not own or bring their dogs to work (Barker et al. 2012; Hall and Mills 2019, p. 10).

#### b) interaction and group dynamics

Open communication and trust are seen as highly relevant characteristics of a preferable company for employees (Goffee and Jones 2013) and relationships with colleagues are one of the most important factors for employee job satisfaction (Spiceworks 2017). Therefore creating a suitable social environment for their employees is highly relevant for companies. With dogs having impact on societies and human interactions, this benefits could be transferred to the office as well.

Some managers seem to notice that influence on dogs on the social capital of a community spills over to the workplace as well. But only little is known on how dogs influence the community in the workplace nevertheless. Only one office-related research was performed till



today. Hall and Mills (2019) found that people who bring their dog to work often scored over average on friendship acuity within the office, supporting the idea that dogs can enhance social interaction but also social bonding in a workplace setting.

### c) Image

People and places in general appear happier and more relaxed when a dog is in the scenario (Rossbach and Wilson 1992). In addition, pet-friendly policies can represent a relaxed culture and informality, conveying a certain image to the outside world. Coming across as dog friendly is good PR for companies (Ferguson 2016).

It also attracts a certain kind of applicants, creating a benefit in the competitive job market (Foderaro 1999). This becomes even more relevant when taking into account that Millennials will overtake the baby boomers soon as the largest pet-owning generation (Daniels 2015) and this generation is more likely to switch jobs rather than work for a low-reputation employer (Hay Group 2013, p. 8). With this changing environment and expectations from employees, companies need to offer distinct packages of benefits and policies that shape the workplace experience so that it relates to the needs of prospective and current employees (Moroko and Uncles 2008). For example, nowadays, companies that have policies that support a work-life balance in place are more attractive for the young workforce than companies without (Carless and Wintle 2007; Honeycutt and Rosen 1997). Therefore, pet-friendly policies become more relevant for this new generation of workers.

Allowing dogs also symbolizes a sense of values that make applicants as well as employees able (or not able) to identify with (Barker 2005). According to the social identity theory, people derive their self-concept from their membership in certain social groups and therefor join companies that fit ones' own values and staffed with people similar to the applicant (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004, p. 506). Pet-friendly policies might help employees and applicants who are dog-owners, dog-affine or in general more relaxed about rules and regulations to identify with

a company. Consequently, pet-friendly policies can be important component of the decision for or against a job for applicants and have a relevant role in employer branding (Foderaro 1999; Daniels 2015).

### ***Risks of dogs at the workplace***

While mentioned benefits make pet-friendly policies attractive, certain risks cannot be neglected.

#### **a) Allergies, phobias and dislikes**

According to Allergy Asthma Immunol Research, an estimated 10-20% of people worldwide are allergic to dog hair (Chan and Leung 2018, p. 97), with symptoms varying in intensity and nature from swilling and itching eyes and nose, breathing problems and rashes on the body. Therefore, the threat of allergic reactions by co-workers or visitors toward dogs at the workplace is an important concern. (Foreman et al. 2017).

Companies also have to consider phobias, fears and dislike of dogs of employees. According to a poll from Gallup 11% of Americans are afraid of dogs (Carlson 2001). Bringing dogs to work can increase stress and compromise the wellbeing and the feeling of safety for co-workers who are genuinely scared of animals (Ayyar 2014). Some companies report that they exclude people who dislike dogs or who have allergies during the application process (Foderaro 1999). In the very competitive environment in the hunt for talent it is also questionable if adding another filter to the recruitment process might lead to a decrease of numbers of applicants for jobs and therefor hurt a company in the long run (Ayyar 2014).

#### **b) Dangers of dogs**

Many companies are afraid of dog bites and other injuries when considering implementing pet-friendly policies. According to UK research about dog related musculoskeletal injury in the UK, dog bites are very scare, most injures related to dogs occur from tripping over the dog or its toys or getting pulled over by a dog on a leash. (Willmott et al. 2012, p. 53). Nevertheless,

companies need to consider of who is (legally) responsible. This might differ from country to country, but injured co-workers might have claim of negligence against the employer for injuries that occur at the work site (Foreman et al. 2017).

#### c) Distractions

Another point that needs to be taken into consideration is the influence of dogs on productivity of owners and non-owners in the office. Dogs can be an extra responsibility for the owner, who needs to continuously keep the dog in mind. Some companies report problems with dogs stealing food, barking, behaving aggressively towards other dogs in the office, which makes owners having to intervene and therefor postpone working (Ferguson 2016). In the study of Barker et al. (2012), 20% of employees without dogs perceived dogs at hurting their personal productivity. In addition, dogs need to take breaks, go outside and need to be fed during the work time. Employees need to take time off their day to take care of the dog which could be spent bonding with colleagues (Ayyar 2014; Foderaro 1999).

#### ***Shortcoming of existing research***

While past research gives a good overview how dogs influence humans in their personal life, little is still known of the effects of dogs in an organizational setting. Most theory regarding pet-friendly policies and the influence on the work community evolved from assuming that dogs' influence in the office is similar to an outside setting, but explicit studies in an office setting are rare. Therefore the research questions for this study are how dogs influence the environment, the community and people's well-being in the work environment and under which circumstances companies can benefit from a pet-friendly policy.

### **Methodology**

#### ***Data sources***

A multiple case study was conducted to examine how dogs influence organizations when they can be brought to the office. An inductive research approach using the grounded theory

methodology was adapted. Such an interpretive research approach gives voice to the interpretation of events to the people who actually experience those events, making the insiders' point of view the main foundation for the findings. Inductive research is particularly useful when exploring topics that are difficult to identify or measure as is the case with the impact of dogs on organizations and the job environment (Eisenhardt et al. 2016). Such an approach allows us to build our understanding of the properly contextualized experiences of those involved in companies with dogs, rather than imposing a particular framework upon them (Gioia et al. 2013, p. 4).

The 5 companies included in the multiple case study are from the creative agency sector, all located in Germany to minimize cultural differences. Companies were contacted directly via mail or phone and asked if dogs are allowed and present and if they would be willing to participate in a case study. The companies varied in size from 6 to 40 employees. A more detailed company profile can be seen in *Appendix 1: Overview of companies*. The heart of grounded theory research are semi-structured interviews (Gioia et al. 2013, p. 7). Interviews are an efficient way to gather rich, empirical data, especially when focusing on phenomena that are episodic and infrequent (Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007).

A total of 12 people from 5 different companies were interviewed. To reduce bias, the interviewees were both employees with dogs, managers without and managers with dogs at the workplace, looking at the phenomena of dogs at the workplace from diverse perspectives (Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007). All informants were highly knowledgeable about the topic of dogs at the workplace and highly involved in the processes. The interviews lasted between 25-45 minutes and at least one of each interview-set was held directly at the agency. All interviews were held in German, then transcribed and at the end translated to English.

During the interviews, more and more information and insides was repetitive, until during the last company, no more additional data was added. In that interview, no more first-order terms

were added to the analysis, as shown in Appendix 2, where the last company E, did not add more information but only supported already identified points. According to Grosseohme (2014) and Morse (1995), the categories and thereby the research is saturated, when no more additional new information is found during interviews. This led the author to the conclusion that in this research setting, the categories and thereby the research was saturated after the 12<sup>th</sup> interview. Therefore no further interviews were performed.

The interviews included questions regarding the policies around dogs, positive and negative effects noticed, change in work behaviour when dogs are present, and managers were asked regarding their motivations for allowing dogs in the office, as shown in the two interview guidelines in *Appendix 3: Interview guideline Managers* and *Appendix 4: Interview guideline employee*. Questions were modified and added during the interviews to adapt and to find deeper connections.

In addition to interviews, the researcher also engaged in direct observation of social interactions and the work environment (e.g. interaction of co-workers with the dog, physical set up of agency, place of dog) to uncover insights regarding the general feeling about dogs at the agency and the environment of the companies. After the interviews, the websites and the social media accounts of the companies were analysed.

### ***Data analysis***

The analysis followed established techniques and procedures for grounded-theory building after Gioia and consisted of a series of steps to move from the found data to ground theory (Gioia et al. 2013, p. 13).

The interview transcripts were analysed for important terms and observations mentioned. Those quotes were collected, mostly sticking to informants' terms and language when writing down the thoughts. Quotes regarding the same topic from employees and managers were clustered and compared. From that, a total of 38 1-st order categories were identified, with every category

describing a similar phenomenon in multiple interviews and companies. The first order concepts unveiled key elements but no deeper patterns or relationship in the data. Examples of quotes for all the 1-st order categories are shown in Appendix 5. The categories were then examined and combined in the most relevant key terms. For example, many people mentioned that taking breaks whenever necessary is important for having a dog in the office to deal with the animal's needs, which was identified as a need for autonomy in job design. Only at this point, existing literature was taken under consideration more closely, comparing data with existing theories. Importantly, not only terms were taken into account that were mentioned most by all participants, but also terms and connections, that have not been mentioned in the literature as much like social cohesion as a result from dogs (Grossoehme 2014). When a rather unknown phenomena was found, the quotes of other interviews were scanned for information that support or contradict with the new idea. Only points, which could be seen as an overall tendency was included in the results. These categories are 2-nd order categories which can be explained by the combination of first-order terms, all backed up with multiple quotes from the interviews and facts from observation. In this research, a total of 12 categories emerged.

In the third step of the analysis, the 12 major categories were brought together even further in 4 unique aggregate dimensions. For this, the relations between first-order themes and second-order categories were examined and the overarching concepts regarding the influence of dogs in companies were captured. Further literature regarding employee satisfaction, culture and policies was consulted to form independent but relevant dimensions. For example, the trial and error mentality, autonomy in job design, and open communication are all pointing to a flexible organizational culture and policies all influenced that employees with dogs felt able to bring the dog and deal with the extra burden a dog brings. Therefore, it became visible that these points were prerequisites to benefit from dogs in the office. From this analysis, the data structure as shown in Appendix 6 was formed.

## **Findings**

### ***The foundation: dogs as an added responsibility***

The interviews revealed that dogs are an added responsibility, not just in the work environment. People often compared dogs with having a child regarding the added responsibility to take care of another creature that is helpless without its caretaker. The question of the whereabouts of the dogs during working hours is a stressful for owners. In a work environment, the dogs need a certain amount of time. Small disturbances like barking or playing are not unusual but are not seen as too much disturbance. Dog owners also reported that a certain amount of attention is almost always paid to the dog although it was said that this does not compromise productivity. In extremely stressful situations, employees and dog owning managers said that the animals are more of a burden e.g. the necessity to go for a walk when the workload does not allow it during lunch.

### ***Flexible organizational culture and policies***

During the interviews and the analysis, it became clear that certain prerequisites are necessary that were found in all companies to create an environment where dogs can be at the office without being a burden for the owner. Those findings were not revealed through questioning about requirements but rather mentioned from managers as well as employees when asked about their or the employee's daily work behaviour, dealing with problems and if any restrictions are in place regarding dogs at the workplace. This is an indicator that these factors are not simply thought as relevant for allowing dogs at the workplace by management but have a real impact on the effectivity and the feasibility of pets at the office.

*Trial and Error mentality:* None of the managers during the interviews made any restrictions regarding the number of dogs at the workplace. Statements regarding that topic like “No, in the first line the dog is welcome and then let's see how it works” show that an environment is created where things will be tried to see what works and where intervention is needed. The

same flexibility was discovered when discussing breed and kind of dog. This also gives the companies a certain amount of flexibility reacting to employees demands. While one manager stated *“the difficulty is that once it was allowed and then gradually came, you can't forbid it to the others then”*, by having a trial and error mentality, the managers are able to intervene and create rules and actions if the workplace is disturbed.

*Open communication:* When problems occur regarding the dogs, all managers say that addressing the problem openly and directly is essential make pet-friendly policies work. Employees mentioned that it is also relevant that managers take actions when dogs show disturbing behaviours. Problems cannot be ignored when the general work climate is compromised. Weekly face to face employee-supervisor meetings are often used to address those points. But, a certain degree of flexibility also decreases stress for owner. When a manager is dog owner himself, the perceived pressure for dog owners during or after incidents like barking or “accidents” decreases.

*Autonomy in job design:* When asked how the dog at work changes the daily work behaviour, most interview partners mentioned the necessity of breaks for the sake of the dog. Most employees said that their lunch breaks increase with the dog present, but it was also stated that due to flexible hours and autonomy, this would not be an issue. Looking at this from a different angle, inflexible work schedules would lead to a greater pressure and increased stress for the dog owner, possibly cancelling out the benefits that dogs bring. In addition, most managers mentioned that bringing a companion does take away some time even during working hours. *“Surely the dogs partly rob a little working time. It's got to be said.”* With that, flexible hours are crucial so that the animal does not have a negative impact on productivity for the owner in the work environment.

#### ***Positive influence on job satisfaction and climate***

All companies had the prerequisites mentioned above. But in general, the interviewees believe



that the company benefits from having the animals in the office. Four main areas were identified how dogs can have a positive influence on job satisfaction as well as climate. Interestingly, those factors are not limited to the owners, but effect the whole company.

*Positive work environment and stress release:* As stated as the number one reason for dogs at workplaces according to the literature, interviewees also reported a high impact of dogs on perceived stress and positive work environment. According to self-report, the dogs help employees cope with stress. Little breaks to cuddle the dog helps to recharge and increase the mood, as shown in the quote of one employee:

*“So I somehow sit and hack on my laptop and talk on the phone and he comes and then I notice immediately, I take my time, look down at him, cuddle him, take him on my lap, then cuddle him again, and then I recharge my batteries in that moment, which maybe half an hour of break wouldn't have brought me.”*

But not only owners' profit from those small mental breaks. In most companies it was reported that non-dog-owner co-workers play or cuddle with the dogs as well, using this time as a mental break from their work.

*“I think there are always 1-2 people who are really close with the dogs who like to play with their blanket and you can see that they are somehow so completely out of what they just did and I think that gives them energy”.*

This connection goes so far that co-workers get attached to the dogs.

Another topic which has not yet received a lot of attention in the existing literature is the benefit of the mandatory lunch break for dog owners. According to both managers as well as employees with dogs, going out for lunch with the dog is an enormous stress release due to the fresh air and the exercise but also due to the simple fact of taking a break. Especially in high workload related companies like agencies, many workers skip their breaks to continue working.

*“They lead in any case to the fact that at least the dog owners have to really do a lunch break, that can happen in agencies quite often hat one tends to leave out the break if there is too much work at times. [...] That was also for me personally one of the motives for having a dog.”*

Another manager notices the influence of a walk for the employee's work behaviour

*“I honestly notice that the dog helps her because she goes out with him twice, she goes out twice and that's sometimes very good and when she comes back with him after 20 minutes I get the impression that a few knots have loosened in the 20 minutes and it seems to be the fresh air.”*

Studies also show that doing exercises and movements during breaks can increase productivity and well-being (Henning et al. 1997), decrease muscular pain (Trougakos and Hideg 2009) and are important for recovering during work (Trougakos and Hideg 2009). Lastly, the dogs have a positive impact on the work environment, bringing “*smile[s] to the other employees*” and “*sending out positive vibes*” for owners, co-workers and management.

*Communication increase:* As reported in the literature, the analysis showed that dogs often act as an ice breaker. Employees and managers reported that dogs break barriers with customers and give a topic of conversation and bonding between customer and service provider. A possibly additional effect is the positive impact on integration of new employees who own a dog. According to one employee, the dog helped her get in contact with the other dog owners faster to set up arrangements regarding the dog. This supports the hypothesis of Hall and Mills (2019) that dogs benefit social integration in a work setting. While the literature shows an increase in social interaction, the reasons were only guessed. One of the managers of the company described a phenomenon, that gives an insight of how dogs influence the communication inside of the workplace even further.

*“The dogs definitely contribute to the exchange across the teams because the dogs are such a connecting element.[...] so even if I'm only with a team because my dog is running there, or vice versa, that's just a lot more social exchange in the whole agency.”*

Therefore, the pure existence of the dogs in the office can lead to a higher information exchange between different departments or supervisor and employees. Other interviews also showed that dog owners sometimes followed their dogs in other departments or that people came to visit the dog, which also increased social exchange.

*Social cohesion:* In many cases, dogs seem to not only foster social interaction and integration but also social cohesion. Dog owners often support each other, creating a sub community inside the company. The services go from going out with the dog for lunch when someone has too much stress or an appointment to taking the dog even when a colleague is on vacation or a

longer business trip. This social cohesion can create a sense of belonging and commitment to the company and the colleagues, as seen in the following quote:

*“and there you can see we also support each other a lot. We already have this small community, of course, because you can better assess what is missing among each other.”*

This support also exceeds dog-owners because also non-dog owners take care of a companion when the owner is busy. This shows that the positive influence of dogs on community found by Bulsara et al. (2007) is replicated in the work-setting as well, creating social support and cohesion as well as a better functioning community.

*Appreciation and commitment:* Employees have a high appreciation for the pet-friendly policies of their employers. They see it as privilege and as prestigious, which leads to a high appreciation of the company. All employees sounded very glad and positive when talking about their company's pet-friendly policy.

But it also becomes clear that restricting this freedom would decrease the appreciation of the company in the eyes of the dog-owners. Taking away this benefit in the short-term would lead to stress for the owner and a decrease of motivation. One employee said *“That would, yes, that would definitely lead to demotivation”*. In the long term, most interviewees with dogs are certain that they would switch jobs if it would not be possible to bring the dog anymore.

*“I have a dog and I can never see him and I would ask myself if that is really the place where I would have to work”* This is also not dependent on whether the dog or the job came first.

*“So, for every day, I'd get myself a new job. We took the dog under the premise that we can both take the dog with us”.*

Managers are aware of these consequences, and some even add that *“if we suddenly would say the dog is not allowed, I probably lose two employees”* referring to co-workers, who got attached to the office dog as well.

This supports the idea that dog-friendly policies are a tool to influence employee retention and acquisition. Many managers reported cases where bringing the dog to work has been made a requirement during job interviews, showing the relevance for applicants. But it also underlines

the importance of consistency. First allowing and later forbidding dogs in the office again might lead to high retention rates and therefor turnover costs to replace the trained staff.

### ***Symbolism of dogs at work***

*Company fit:* When talking about applicants, the managers were asked what impact it would have if an applicant did not like dogs or had an allergy. Interestingly, the managers see the dogs as part of the office's environment making it a factor that the applicant needed to take into consideration rather than the managers. One manager even questioned the suitability of the applicant:

*“then I would also immediately think, ok if he already starts like that, then he doesn't fit in here either. That's just the way it is in agencies, that everything is always very open and relaxed and that's kind of like that”.*

By including dogs on the websites as part as the "team" or by including them in regular Facebook-posts, potential applicants are also aware of the situation very early during the application process. One manager said *“all those who have looked into us know that dogs play a role with us and so the question came up relatively quickly”*. In fact, one of the five companies used their dogs frequently for image and brand building, including the dogs on social media and the website, examples shown (

Appendix 7, Appendix 8, Appendix 9). Two other firms use it sometimes, but do not focus on the dogs. For two companies, their company-controlled media does not show any office dogs.

*Values and implications:* It becomes clear that allowing dogs is not just a benefit for employees given by the company, but it also reflects on the company's values regarding openness and flexibility. But it also a sign how willing employers are to deal with employees needs and work-life balance. This becomes clear looking at the quotes from two managers:

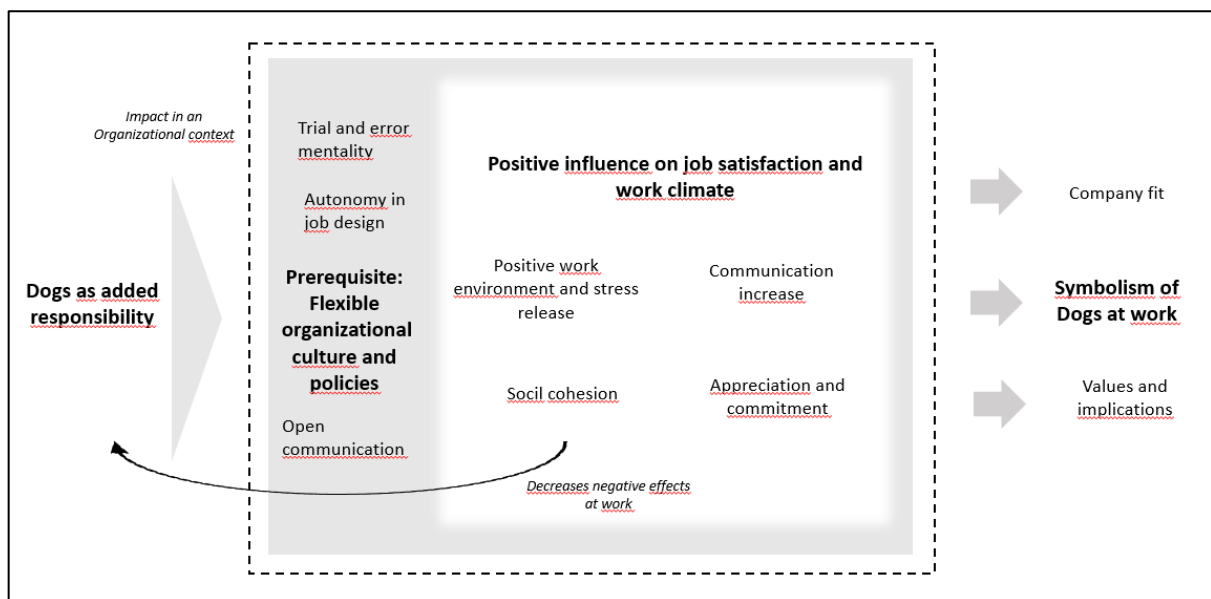
*“So if something is important for an employee, then I do well to take it seriously.”*

*“So we want to give our employees as much freedom and entertainment as possible and work-life balance and life-life balance and opportunities, and for me that includes that.”*

Allowing dogs therefor on the one hand reflect openness and flexibility, but on the other hand also shows a certain degree of employee focus from the supervisors. This is adding factors to employer branding, especially regarding the fact that most employer-rating-sites include benefits like pet-friendly policies in the filters.

### Grounded Theory model

While Appendix 6 shows the static data structure for the key themes emerged from the interviews during the analysis, *Figure 1*: Grounded theory model: The influence of pet-friendly policies on the organization and the relevance of company culture displays the dynamic processual relationships as a basis for the grounded theory model about the influence of pet-



*Figure 1: Grounded theory model: The influence of pet-friendly policies on the organization and the relevance of company culture*

friendly policies on the organization and the necessary requirements regarding the organizational environment.

With dogs adding a level of stress, the environment in a company has an impact on how much dogs have a positive influence on the employees and the business itself. Dogs only have a positive impact if the company's values include flexibility, open communication and autonomy regarding working hours. Otherwise having a companion at work that has its own rhythm could

increase stress levels and decrease productivity for the owners. This is consistent with the general belief that it is highly relevant that the employee benefit sub-system and policies are kept consistent with actual system designs and the culture and the company goals to have an positive impact (Yamamoto 2011). If this is not the case, the success of strategies and policies are often limited (den Dulk and Ruijter 2008).

Having a certain environmental context as prerequisite for a working system also changes the impact of having pet-friendly policies in place on the image and reputation of a company. As stated by Cunha et al. (2019) and Ferguson (2016), pet-friendly policies can be used to create a certain image for the outside world for example as coming across as a company with a relaxed culture and informality. This study takes this assumption to another level. Pet-friendly policies are actually only successfully possible when the company really is flexible and employees have autonomy regarding their work hours. This makes pet-friendly policies a way bigger influence on the image and the employer branding as thought before. This also raises the question on how to assess companies that tried to adopt a pet-friendly policy and failed. This would be an indicator that the company is lacking at least one attribute of flexibility, autonomy and open communication.

Because it was found out that social cohesion is a requisite to take pressure of the dog-owner and a reason they did not feel compromised in their flexibility when they brought the dog, a culture of community and support is also relevant. Very competitive environments with high individualism might hinder support between co-workers, making it unsuitable for pet-friendly policies as well. Because a company's culture has an influence on peoples' behaviours and problem-solving (Schein 2004), it is also highly relevant on the success of pet-friendly policies as shown in this research. In general, including dogs in the office can also foster a desired more cooperating environment and better social support and thereby create culture change. But it needs to be kept in mind that cultural change can only be created when management behaviour

and communication is adopted as well (Solms and Solms 2004, p. 276; Schwartz and Davis 1981). Only then the company and the employees become enabled to change the culture rather than having hardly used or not feasible policies and benefits (Havard Business Review 2019). The study underlines that company strategy and culture need to be aligned with the human resource strategy and its measures and organizational requirements (Bird and Beechler 1995). Therefore, not all companies can implement this policies, it needs to fit to the circumstances and the culture.

If these prerequisites are in place however, pet-friendly policies foster job satisfaction and have a positive influence on the work climate in the workplace. Small breaks to notice, cuddle or play with the dogs are used from owners and co-workers to release stress. Because stress negatively effects the well-being of employees and it is related to burnout tendencies (Travers and Cooper 1993) and retention willingness (Goffee and Jones 2013), the decreased stress can improve company performance. Mandatory lunch breaks for dog-owners have a similar effect on productivity and well-being. In addition, higher social inclusion and social support (from co-workers as well as the animal) increases the well-being and job-satisfaction. Plus, people also seem to be happy of the existence of the dogs in the office and employees' and supervisors' communication increases when dogs are walking around freely in the office. Therefore, on a company level, the dogs are plus for dog affine workers but also increase social interaction and over-department exchange and therefor they increase the general social capital of a company.

Appreciation for the benefit of bringing their dog seems to play an important role in the commitment. But while Hall and Mills measured a lower willingness to leave the company, it is important to mention that should the company take away the benefit to bring the dog, most owners would quit and look for a different job. It seems that the commitment is fragile and might also decrease when number of pet-friendly companies increase and therefor dog-owners find more employment choices where they can bring their dogs.

This impact on climate and job satisfaction as well as the existence of prerequisites makes pet-friendly policies also an important point in employer branding. Dogs at the office symbolize flexibility in work hours and policies and an open communication. The positive influence of dogs on the climate seem to be reflected in the general opinion of (ex-)employees of the company. It represents a general people-first approach of the management, portraying that values like work-life balance are relevant for the company. It also adds another level to the culture fit of potential applicants because having dogs at the office require a certain degree of flexibility from the applicant as well.

### **Discussion**

The results generally support the belief that dogs at the workplace can function as stress releaser for owners and co-workers due to their calming presence and the mental breaks they offer for employees who want to interact with the pets. The analysis show that the positive influence of dogs on communities can also be transferred to the office environment, making this a new contribution to the study of dogs' influence. In the office, the animals increase social cohesion, create a feeling of community and increase the information exchange. Importantly, this is the first study binding the positive effects of dogs to certain prerequisites that need to be fulfilled in the company. Flexible hours and autonomy are key for the pet-owners to be able to deal with the responsibility of the animal during work. An open and trial and error mentality of employees and managers create a feeling of safety for dog-owners but also ensures that the work environment is not disturbed too much.

It is important to highlight that those requisites are not necessary in order to be able to implement pet-friendly policies, but it is highly relevant when companies want to benefit from it with decreased stress for employees, better work atmosphere and social capital.

The mentioned findings have important business implications. Although it becomes more and more common for “young and trendy” companies to allow dogs at work, companies should also



consider if its culture is ready for it. Supposedly good incentives implemented in a wrong culture and framework might backfire and hurt the company by putting more pressure and stress on the owners because for example breaks cannot be taken flexibly.

While this research showed the necessity of a certain flexibility and autonomy in a company to benefit from pet-friendly policies, this raises the question what happens if this environment is not given. Further research should investigate what the extend of the consequences are for employees and the company if the culture and the management is not ready for dogs at the office. In addition, while the study showed that dogs enhance the social capital of a company, the degree on job satisfaction and performance is still unknown. For this, investigating into a company before and after implementing the policy might be from interest because the named prerequisites are already associated with a positive climate, job satisfaction and performance, so a comparison between dogless and dog including companies might be misleading. This research focused on managers in pet-friendly companies and employees who bring their dogs to work, indicating that all participants are rather positive towards the topic dogs in organizations. It would be further interesting to investigate the view of other stakeholders like employees who do not like dogs or feel disturbed by their presence.

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## Appendix

	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4	Company 5
Kind of company	Marketing agency	Film production	Marketing agency	PR Agency	Marketing agency
Number of Employees	10	6	40	30	12
Number of dogs total	2	1	1-3	5	4
Number of Employees bringing dogs	1	1	1-3	5	4
Time since dog-friendly policy	5 years	3 months	9 years	20 years	20 years

### *Appendix 1: Overview of companies*

	Comp. A	Comp. B	Comp. C	Comp. D	Comp. E
<b>Increased responsibility at work</b>					
•dog as a burden during high stress phases at work					
•dog means responsibility at work					
•even though there is no noticeable decrease of productivity, the dog still has constant consideration					
•dogs sometimes disturb working situations with barking or running around					
•complains are possible but are more short impressions, not a general dislike					
<b>Increased responsibility in general</b>					
•owners compare dogs to children regarding the feeling of responsibility					
•the question what to do with the dog during work hours is stressful					
<b>Trial and error mentality</b>					
•no regulations about number or hours of dogs present					
•No regulations regarding size or breed, "it just needs to work"					
•Integration is process to make it work for everyone					
•No decision towards dogs, but there were no reason against it, so it was tried					
<b>Autonomy in job design</b>					
•Flexible hours are crucial so breaks can be taken when necessary					
•flexible working hours are necessary so bringing a dog does not have an influence on productivity, because smaller breaks need to be incorporated					
<b>Open communication</b>					
dealing with dogs at work means open communication between dog owner and management; management needs to take action and be open for dialog					
•problems are tried to be solved before restrictions are determined					
•Being considerate decreases stress for owners					
•When the managers own dogs as well, employees appreciate that and feel less stressed					
<b>Positive work environment and stress release</b>					
•It brings a smile to the other employees					
•Dogs are sending out positive vibes and have a relaxing aura					
•non dog-owners get attached to office dogs and use dog as stress release during breaks					
•dogs reduces pressure on dog owner to find suitable daycare option					
•dogs force employees to take (lunch) breaks and actively leave the office					
•Break is mostly experienced as a relieve and as a source of new energy					
•small breaks to cuddle and stroke the dog are a welcomed stress reduction					
•dogs offer emotional support for owners "mental breaks"					
<b>Social cohesion</b>					
•It generally strengthens social cohesion between other dog owners because it is something where people support each other					
•dogs foster integration for new colleagues; creation of small dog-owning community					
•when owner has too much stress, colleagues take care of the dog					
•colleagues take dogs when owner is on vacation or on a business trip					
<b>Communication increase</b>					
•dogs increase social exchange overlapping teams in bigger organizations by wandering around in the office spaces					
•dogs help to break barriers with customers					
•dogs give you a conversation topic and a bond with customers					
<b>Appreciation and commitment</b>					
•Employees have a high appreciation for their employers that they can bring their dogs					
•taking the dog to work is seen as a privilege, something that is prestigious restricting the freedom of bringing the dogs would lead to decrease of appreciation of the company					
•Managers are certain that rewinding bringing dogs would lead to employee departure					
•Bringing dogs to work has been made a requirement during interviews a lot, so the competitive advantage is real					
<b>Company fit</b>					
•managers believe that people who are not open to dogs in the office might not be the right fit for the company					
•It's not my choice, it's our environment so it's the choice of the applicant					
<b>Values and implications</b>					
•being able to bring dogs also gives an impression how the company cares for the employees in general					
•Allowing dogs to work goes hand in hand with offering employees freedom and a work-life balance. Idea of flexible working hours, home office, remote work					

## Appendix 2: Information sources by company

General information: Pet-friendly policies	
1. Since when are dogs allowed in the office of your company? Seit wann dürfen Hunde in das Büro mitgebracht werden?	
2. How many employees are bringing dogs with them to the workplace? How many dogs are in the office on a daily basis? Wie viele Mitarbeiter bringen ihre Hunde mit? Wie viele Hunde sind im Büro vorhanden?	
3. A) Why did you decide to allow dogs in the office? B) What was your main motivation and what did you hope to gain by a pet-friendly policy? C) Where your expectations met after implementing a pet-friendly policy? Welche Beweggründe hatten Sie, das Mitbringen von Hunden bei der Arbeit zu erlauben?/ Was erhofften Sie sich am meisten damit zu erreichen?/ Ist dieses Ziel Ihrer Meinung nach eingetroffen?	
4. What pet-friendly policies are enforced in the company now? Welche tierfreundlichen Regelungen haben Sie hier in dem Unternehmen?	
5. Are there additional restrictions and rules with bringing dogs to the office? - E.g. frequency, seniority of employee, rank Gibt es Restriktionen oder weitere Regeln?	
6. Are there any rules or guidelines regarding race and age of the dogs that need to be followed? Gibt es Einschränkungen bzgl Rasse, Alter,...?	
7. Where there any incidents that lead to the restrictions and rules? Gab es Vorfälle, die zu den Regeln und Restriktionen geführt haben?	
8. Are there rules that you would like to adjust? Gibt es Regeln, die Sie gerne anpassen würden?	
9. Have incidents occurred before that made you doubt the idea of dogs in the office like biting or barking? Gab es schon einmal Zwischenfälle? (z.B. Beißen, Unruhe?) Wie wurde darauf aus Leitungssicht reagiert?	
10. How are new dogs getting integrated into the office? Wie werden neue Hunde in das Büro integriert?	
If the policy was not implemented from the beginning	
11. Did you notice changes in the behaviour of the employees since dogs are allowed in the office? - Work climate - hours worked/ flexibility - group dynamic/ work ethic  (Falls Umstellung von keine Hunde auf Hunde): Konnten Veränderungen bei Mitarbeitern festgestellt werden, seit Hunde in Büros erlaubt sind? Wie sieht es hier aus bezüglich: - Arbeitszeiten - Klima - Zusammenarbeit	
12. A) Were there complains against the/ a dog/s in the office from co-workers? (e.g. allergies, fear/ phobia, disturbance of the work atmosphere) B) How did the management deal with these complains and problems?  Gab es Zwischenfälle, wo Mitarbeiter gegen das Vorhanden sein von Hunden waren? (Angst, Allergie, Unruhe) Wie wird mit diesen Situationen umgegangen?	
13. How do potential employees and new employees react towards the policies? Wie reagieren potentielle Mitarbeiter und neue Mitarbeiter auf die Regelungen?	
14. What is the general reaction of clients towards dogs? Are there specific adjustments necessary as a agency that deals with visitors on a daily basis? Wie reagieren Kunden auf die Hunde?	

### Appendix 3: Interview guideline Managers



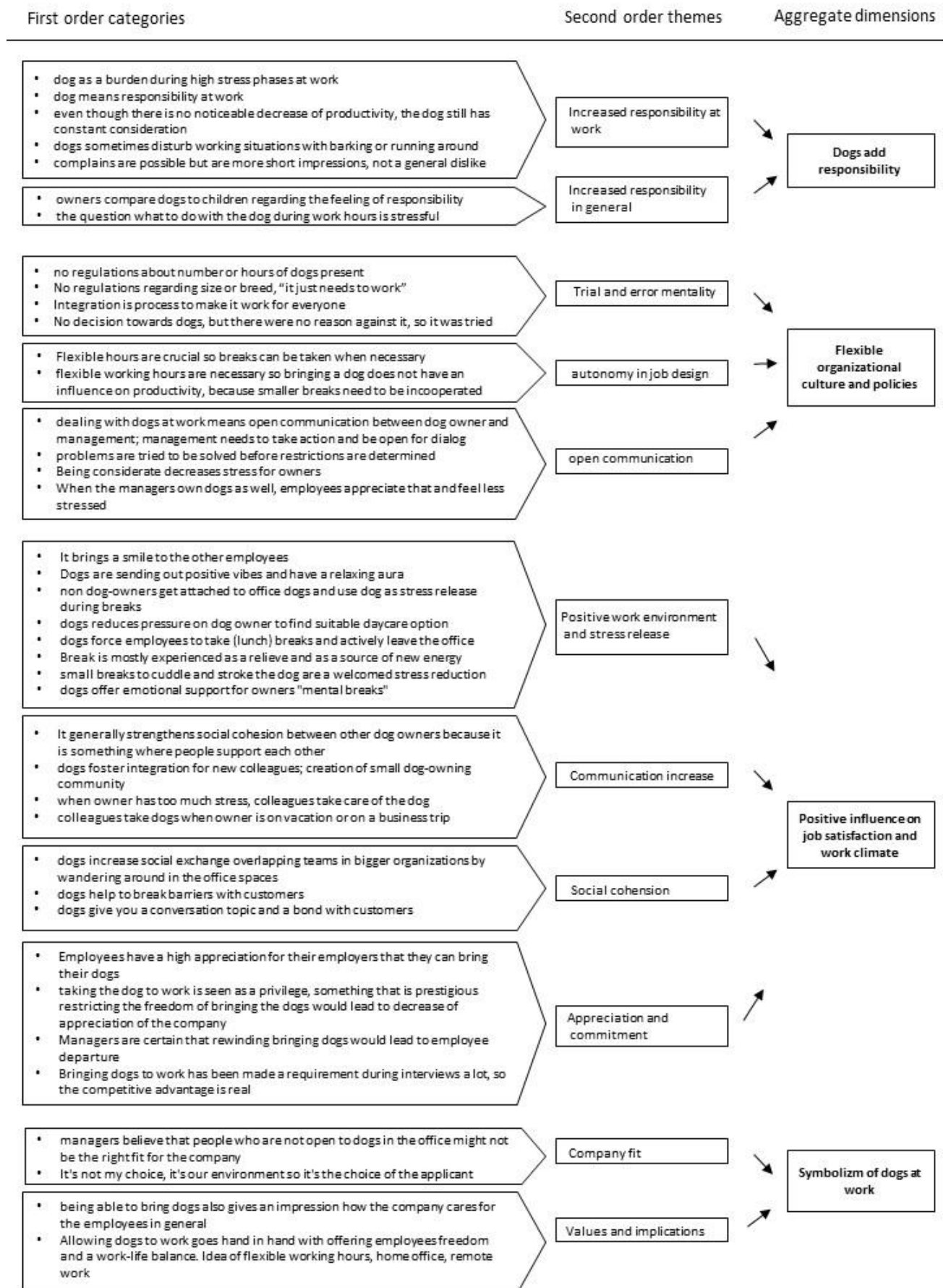
<b>General Information</b>
1. Since when do you own a dog? Seit wann haben Sie den Hund?
2. Since when are dogs allowed in the office and since when are you bringing your own dog to work with you? Seit wann können Sie den Hund mitbringen und seit wann bringen Sie den Hund tatsächlich mit?
3. How did the integration of your dog at the office work? Wie ist die Integration deines Hundes hier abgelaufen?
4. How often do you bring your dog with you to the office? Wie oft bringen Sie den Hund mit?
5. What did you do with your dog before you were able to bring him to work with you? Wie haben Sie vor dieser Regelung/ in anderen Unternehmen das Problem Arbeit-Hund geregelt?
<b>Evaluation of the existing pet-friendly policy</b>
6. How do you like the general composition of the pet-friendly policy? Wie finden Sie die generelle Gestaltung der Regelungen für das Mitbringen von Hunden?
7. Are there rules or guidelines you would like to change? Gibt es Punkte, die Sie gerne an den Regelungen ändern würden?
8. How would you react if you were not allowed to bring your dog to work anymore? Wie würden Sie reagieren, wenn Sie Ihren Hund nicht mehr zur Arbeit bringen könnten?
<b>Work behaviour</b>
9. Do you think your work behaviour has changed ever since you can bring your dog with you to work? - Length - Breaks - Flexibility  Hat sich Ihr Arbeitsverhalten geändert seit Sie Ihren Hund mit zur Arbeit bringen dürfen? - Länge - Pausen - Flexibilität
10. A) Where there any incidents with the dogs that you remember? e.g.: - Disturbances - Fights - Problems with co-workers - Stress for the dog - complains Gab es schon einmal Zwischenfälle mit den Hunden?
10. B) How did the company react and how did you feel about the reactions/ actions taken? Wie hat das Unternehmen Ihrer Meinung nach hierauf reagiert?
11. You work a lot with clients as an agency. How do clients react to the/ your dog? Was sagen Kunden zu den Hunden?

#### *Appendix 4: Interview guideline employee*



<p>"I can go to the office without a dog are really more relaxed, because I also say, now I can have a date with a colleague, now I don't have to go for a walk, now I can have dinner or something. Well, it is, it is a liberation sometimes."</p> <p>"Well, I sometimes find it stressful to have a dog at work because I have this responsibility."</p> <p>"If I'm so busy, I still have to go out."</p> <p>"Bringing dogs with you of course also means obligation. Of course, you always have an eye on what they're doing"</p> <p>"There are sometimes situations where they bark. But that's relatively short. So, if this were to degenerate into barking through permanently"</p>	Increased responsibility at work
<p>"Where I would look what I can do with him the three days a week, so who takes care of him. It's like a kid suddenly doesn't have a daycare place anymore"</p> <p>"Because if you can't bring your dog to work anymore, then you have a really big problem."</p>	Increased responsibility in general
<p>"So there is no regulation, there is only a gut feeling and I would discuss it with all employees"</p> <p>"So if you find out after the dog had a chance, that is long enough here, that you get to know the dog"</p> <p>"I would rather say there were no motives not to allow it"</p>	Trial and error mentality
<p>"Which is not a problem, no one's looking at the clock now and says that's not ok. I wouldn't say now that, somehow, the productivity suffers. Well, no more as if there are people standing at the coffee machine for too long, so it's not like we have a fixed time anyway, but you have to do what has to be done and how long that takes...so if you can do the work in 5 hours, you can go home and if you need 10 hours, then you need 10 hours."</p>	Autonomy in job design
<p>"we have regular personnel sprints, i.e. four-eye interviews with the management and employees, and that's where we talk about something like that. Both positive and negative"</p> <p>"So there was a time when a dog actually growled at this typical example of postman or something. But there was the solution that the colleague really brought a dog psychologist with her"</p> <p>"we have an agreement with all dog owners that we also address critical situations, which can also lead to us prohibiting the bringing of the specific dog"</p>	Open communication
<p>"it's always like this when they are just walking around and sniffing at people and greeting that it's always positive, so that it sends out positive vibes"</p> <p>"when a dog is in the office, the mood rises and that is also a little bit like that."</p> <p>"the two smaller ones are cooler too, bringing back or throwing balls. That's something that the colleagues do more often"</p> <p>"I honestly notice that the dog helps her because she goes out with him twice, she goes out twice and that's sometimes very good and when she comes back with him after 20 minutes I get the impression that a few knots have loosened in the 20 minutes and it seems to be the fresh air."</p> <p>"that sometimes I can work even better through him because I get mental breaks or have to go out at noon and thus create new energy again"</p>	Positive work environment and stress release
<p>"It generally strengthens social cohesion because it is also something where people support each other"</p> <p>"and there you can see we also support each other a lot. We already have this small community, of course, because you can better assess what is missing among each other"</p> <p>"It actually goes so far when we have business trips or even holidays, we each other also take over the dogs"</p> <p>"otherwise you are completely free or even if I'm away for an appointment or bring something away, then I know I am leaving now and the dog lies in his basket two hours"</p> <p>"because then we laughed a lot and then the dogs found each other and therefore it was relatively easy for the integration for me as well"</p>	Social cohesion
<p>"Also, you just talk about them, this is often also a topic to talk about, both with customers and with service providers"</p> <p>"well it is actually always kind of nice when you have the little dog in advance sitting on your lap and then you already have a small topic to start the conversation right away"</p> <p>"so even if I'm only with a team because my dog is running there, or vice versa, that's just a lot more social exchange in the whole agency"</p> <p>"the dogs definitely contribute to the exchange across the teams because the dogs are such a connecting element"</p>	Communication increase
<p>"But I'm thankful that it works that way now in this job at least."</p> <p>"and I would not think very well about the company any longer like I do right now."</p> <p>"Has that ever come up during interviews?- Yes absolutely, that has definitely an influence for a lot of colleagues."</p> <p>"That would, yes, that would definitely lead to demotivation"</p> <p>"I have a dog and I can never see him and I would ask myself if that is really the place where I would have to work"</p> <p>"I actually asked when I had my interview if I could take my dog with me"</p>	Appreciation and commitment
<p>"So we make sure that. at the latest, at job interviews the employees already knows that there are dogs here"</p> <p>"I would say that the applicant, that we are no longer interesting for the applicant. And so, it is not so much my decision, but actually their decision, because that is our environment."</p> <p>"So if someone here would say "Ah, do you really have dogs here, I can't bear that at all", then I would also immediately think, ok if he also starts like that, then he doesn't fit in here either."</p>	Company fit
<p>"but it is also a factor for every dog owner, how my employer deals with the fact that I have a dog and because as a owner one has a responsibility and must plan continuously"</p> <p>"So if something is important for an employee, then I do"</p> <p>"So we want to give our employees as much freedom and entertainment as possible and work-life balance and life-life balance and opportunities, and for me that includes that"</p>	Values and implications

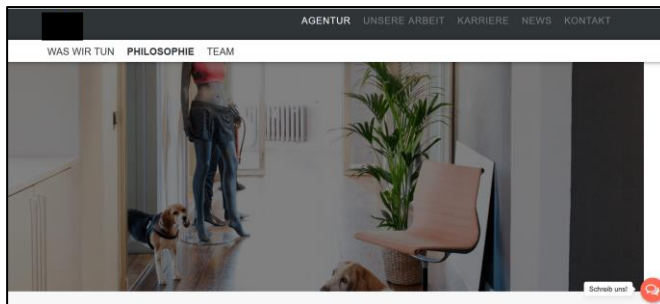
## Appendix 5: quotes leading to first order categories



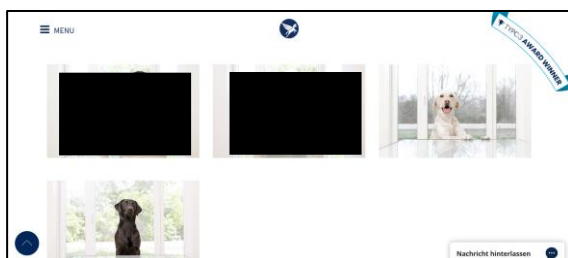
Appendix 6: Data structure



*Appendix 7: Social Media Posts with Dogs*



*Appendix 8: Dogs included in the Website*



*Appendix 9: Dogs presented as part of the team*